The Future of the Coast: Using Long-Term Scenario Planning to Identify Opportunities and Challenges for the Future

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The US coastal economy and society will experience dramatic changes over the next 20 to 30 years.   Economic growth, environment stress, land use changes, dramatic technology acceleration, socio-cultural changes, and changing state and federal budget priorities will all radically transform the socio-economic conditions of the coastal environment.   These challenges will require coastal decision makers to anticipate radically different physical, social and economic environments as they make long-term investment decisions.   In addition, greater attention to sustainability issues means that decision makers must consider the impact of their decisions on future generations' ability to support and sustain the coastal economy, environment, and society. All these factors mean that traditional organizations will be challenged to find new ways to manage the coast. In response to these concerns the National Academy contracted Booz Allen to develop a series of future scenarios that represented the US over the next 50 years. The scenarios focused considerable attention of the coast and the coastal economy.

The rationale for this project was that traditional planning models have been shown to be of little value in helping agencies navigate environments with a high degree of uncertainty. Scenario planning has emerged as a means to help analysts and decision makers envision different requirements that organizations will have to address in the radically different future conditions. Scenario planning helps organizations look into the future and anticipate events and trends, understand risk, provide ideas for preemptive organization response, and help managers break out of their established mental models as they become aware of alternate future possibilities. A scenario is a set of related possibilities that describe one possible future that the strategist cannot control.

Booz Allen used advanced scenario planning techniques to develop a series of future scenarios and identified their implications for the economy and society (including the coastal states).   These scenarios addressed as series of drivers: economic, social, environmental, technological, demographic, land use and resource use trends. Strategic simulation (sometimes known as "Wargaming") was used to convene a group of experts and work with them to create a series of scenarios about the future of the US over the next 20 to 50 years. The scenarios (or future "worlds") were: (1) Crisis World; (2) Dirty World; (3) Mega World; (4) Suburban World; (5) Wonder World; and (6) Green World. Based on this we identified as series of implications for coastal society and the economy.

This presentation will describe the process used to develop these scenarios, describe drivers and scenarios and identify the implications for coastal states.

As part of a facilitated discussion - a panel of NOAA staff and coastal decision makers will discuss the scenarios and explore their implications for current and near-term planning and policy development.   This will help the audience and stakeholders understand the challenges and opportunities that are present and identify their implications for long-term investment and policy decisions.

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